

News Briefing:

Update on key developments, expert comments on North Africa & the Sahel October 2011

Al-Qaeda kidnaps Westerners from Polisario refugee camp, reportedly with help of Polisario insiders

AQIM reaches out from new terror hotspot in Sahel, aided by Polisario, other militants, Qaddafi arms

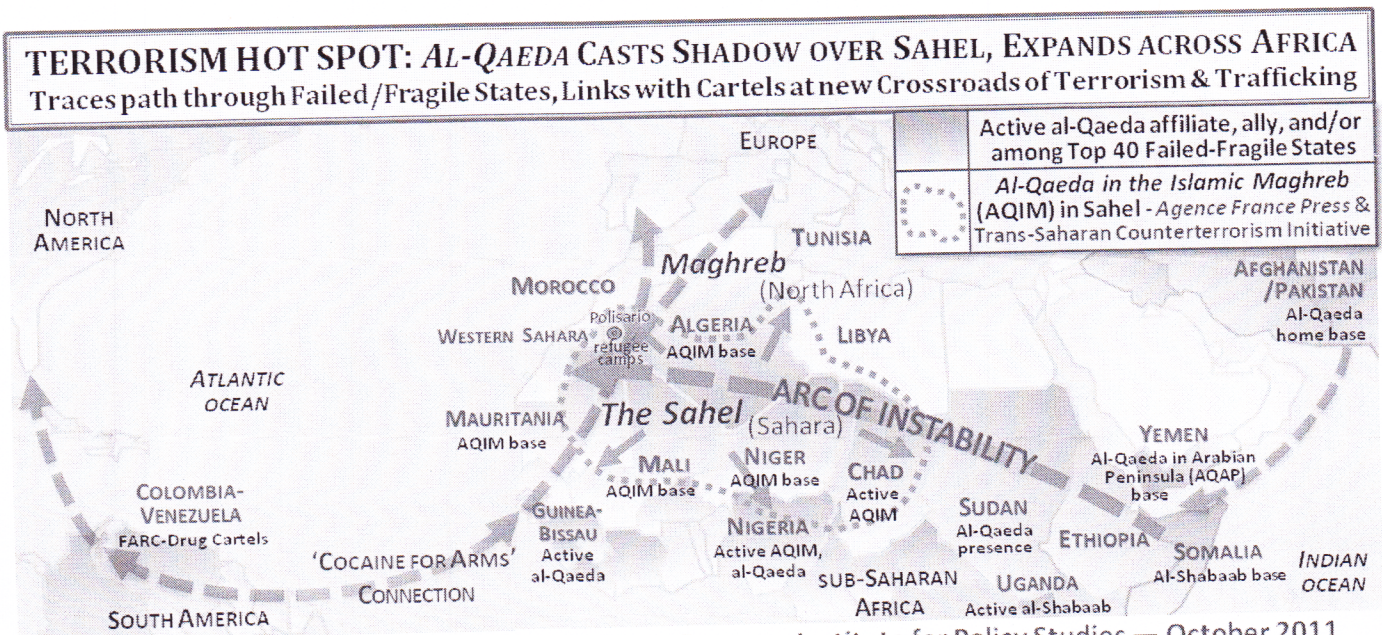
Washington, DC (Oct. 31, 2011)—On Oct. 23, *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)* kidnapped one Italian and two Spanish aid workers from *Polisario*-run refugee camps in Algeria. The abduction was reportedly assisted by *Polisario Front* members in the camps near Tindouf, Algeria, who supplied the insurgents weapons and directions to the victims, now being held as hostages at an undisclosed location. The attack is AQIM's latest advance in Africa's Sahel region, where rising terrorism and a flood of Libyan arms have created what AFRICOM's Head, US Gen. Carter Ham, recently called a "threat to the US" and potentially "very, very dangerous outcome." Since 9/11, attacks by AQIM and other terrorist groups in the Maghreb and Sahel are up more than 500%, according to the ICTS.

- **AFP reports: 'Less than ten unarmed AQIM militants entered the Sahrawi refugee camp in Tindouf, western Algeria where sympathizers of the Polisario Front gave them weapons & helped them seek out the hostages.'** AQIM ties to *Polisario* members are well-established. Mauritania court records show AQIM paid *Polisario* veterans to kidnap Spanish aid workers. Mali & Mauritania have arrested *Polisario* militia in AQIM-linked drug-smuggling. This insider-aided abduction is AQIM's first attack at the *Polisario* base in Algeria, a reputed AQIM recruiting ground.

Agence France Press, CBS News/Global Post, Associated Press, Washington Post, Foreign Policy/Middle East Channel, World Tribune, The Hill

- **Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is serious transnational terror threat, aided by Libyan arms influx and links to separatist Polisario members and other militants, mercenaries, and traffickers in the Sahel.** France declared AQIM its #1 security threat, after a series of high-profile attacks, foreign national kidnappings, and brutal hostage beheading. Reports now confirm AQIM may have obtained Libyan arms from Qaddafi loyalists, including surface-to-air missiles, and is expanding its ties to *Polisario* and other militants in the region.

CBS News/Global Post, Middle East Online, TIME Magazine, Voice of America, ABC News, New York Times, FOX News, CSIS, The Hill



ICTS — International Center for Terrorism Studies, at Potomac Institute for Policy Studies — October 2011

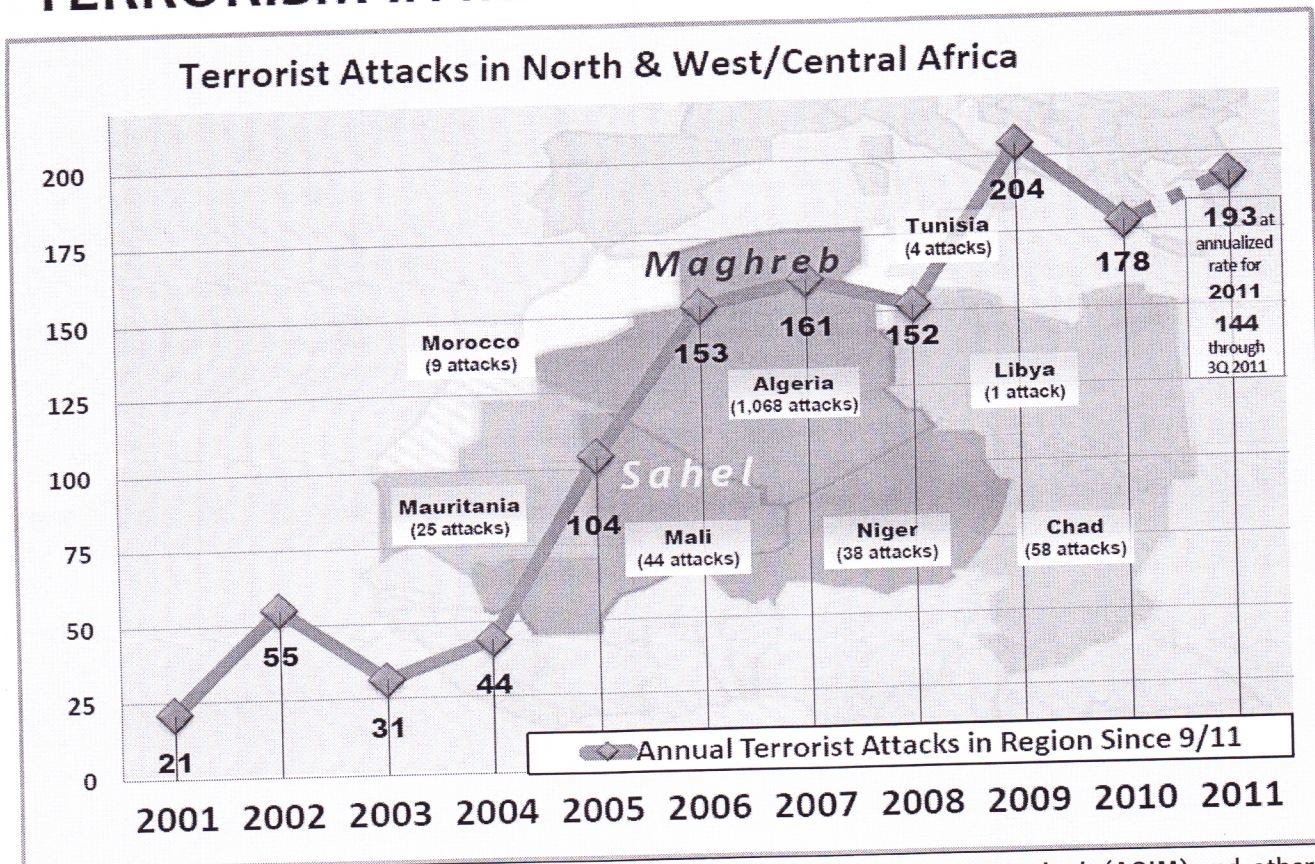
Expert Comments on aid-worker abduction, al-Qaeda, Polisario, & Sahel in recent news/journal reports

- ▶ **"Less than ten unarmed AQIM militants entered the Sahrawi refugee camp in Tindouf, western Algeria, where sympathisers of the Polisario Front gave them weapons and helped them seek out the hostages."**
 - Mediator for AQIM, announcing that hostages are alive and demands for release will come later
"Three Qaeda hostages seized last week alive: mediator," AGENCE FRANCE PRESS (AFP), 10-30-11
http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gfsKPTIgBS_IQzBQK_R-Fdj_-z0A?docId=CNG.fb5674e8c48dbb7ef3f59c256d4c3f07.531
- ▶ **"The European hostages are prisoners of AQIM and its Sahrawi wing." The kidnappers were linked to a Sahrawi member of AQIM named Hakim Ould Mohamed M'Barek, who in 2008 admitted the existence of "an AQIM network of indoctrination and recruitment" inside the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, western Algeria.**
 - Mali security sources, speaking to Agence France Press
"Italian, Spanish hostages taken by Qaeda's 'Sahrawi wing'," AGENCE FRANCE PRESS (AFP), 10-23-11
<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iUz8dShyvB92PQ9paljU96pLF6xw?docId=CNG.431f8929bb859203a81e4e74eac5df3c.4c1>
- ▶ **"To cross the checkpoints of the Algerian army and Polisario, kidnappers benefited from support of Polisario's military."**
 - El Pais, Spain's most widely read daily newspaper
"Kidnappers of three European aid workers benefited from polisario security apparatus' support: Spanish paper says," MOROCCO WORLD NEWS, 10-26-11
<http://moroccoworldnews.com/2011/10/kidnappers-of-three-european-aid-workers-benefited-from-polisario-security-apparatus-support-spanish-paper-says/>
- ▶ **"Whenever you have a pool of young men with nothing else to do and poor prospects, you have a heightened risk—all the more so when the young men in question have had military training as those in the Polisario camps have."** AQIM did use a former Polisario militant to kidnap Spanish aid workers in 2009.
 - Dr. J. Peter Pham, Atlantic Council, director of the Africa center
"Morocco's problem: Freelance jihadis, not al-Qaida," CBS NEWS/ASSOCIATED PRESS, Paul Schemm, 10-16-11
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/10/15/ap/middleeast/main20120959.shtml>
- ▶ **"Shabab, AQIM, Boko Haram are "each individually of concern. But what really concerns me is at least a stated intent for those organizations to link and synchronize their efforts. That to me would be a very, very dangerous outcome for us."**
 - US General Carter Ham, who heads the Africa command, speaking recently in Washington, DC
"Al-Qaeda could be looking for new sanctuaries in troubled African states," MIDDLE EAST ONLINE, Michel Moutot, 10-30-11
<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=48788>
- ▶ **"Al-Qaeda traditionally has taken advantage of areas that are wracked by conflict, turmoil and lack of government. It is a safe haven they seek to launch attacks."**
 - John Brennan, US President Barack Obama's top anti-terrorism official.
"Al-Qaeda could be looking for new sanctuaries in troubled African states," MIDDLE EAST ONLINE, Michel Moutot, 10-30-11
<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=48788>
- ▶ **"U.S. and European officials also worry that AQIM—an al-Qaida group that operates in the west and north of Africa—is working to establish links with Boko Haram and al-Shabab, the Somali insurgent group. "Security threats emanating from Africa are being taken more seriously than they have before, and they're more real."**
 - Jennifer Cooke, Center for Strategic and International Studies, director of the Africa program.
"Somalia, Libya, Uganda: US military increases focus on militant threats from Africa," WASHINGTON POST/AP, 10-27-11
http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/from-western-to-eastern-africa-us-military-increases-focus-on-militant-threats/2011/10/27/gIQA5siYMM_print.html
- ▶ **"We have asked the United Nations to send a mission to Algeria to assess the security situation in the camps of Tindouf."**
 - Spanish Foreign Minister Trinidad Jimenez, after talks in Rabat with Morocco Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri.
"Has Spain switched gear on the Western Sahara conflict?," AL ARABIYA, 10-25-11
<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/10/25/173691.html>
- ▶ **"The risk is greater today because of AQIM's ties with other regional terror groups, like Somali al-Shabab movement. AQIM's expansion is a cause of concern for all of us. Without real regional co-operation between the various countries in the region, of which there are many, and the western nations, we shall never overcome terrorism."**
 - Morocco Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri, at a joint briefing with Spanish Foreign Minister Trinidad Jimenez
"Morocco, Spain discuss anti-terror fight," MAGHAREBIA, Siham Ali, 10-28-11
http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2011/10/27/feature-01
- ▶ **"Polisario is intensifying activities to transport and smuggle a range of illegal drugs in both North Africa and Europe. The Polisario is working with Al Qaida in both the drug and weapons trade. This poses a serious threat to the Maghreb."**
 - Prof. Yonah Alexander, Director, International Center for Terrorism Studies, Potomac Institute of Policy Studies
"Report: Polisario working with Al Qaida in drug, weapons trafficking," WORLD TRIBUNE, 9-20-11
http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2011/ss_terror1178_09_20.asp

Expert Comments: More on aid-worker abduction, al-Qaeda, Polisario, & Sahel in recent news/journal reports

- ▶ ***"Libyan weapons have been acquired by members of the terrorist group al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). An AQIM attack on a Mauritanian garrison in July included surface-to-air missiles that could only have come from Libya."***
 - Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, in an interview with French television
 - "Gadhafi Collapse Raises Concerns Over Arms for Africa al-Qaida,"*** VOICE OF AMERICA, Scott Stearns, 9-29-11
<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/-Gadhafi-Collapse-Raises-Concerns-Over-Arms-For-Africa-al-Qaida-130788458.html>
- ▶ ***'With a gigantic cache of advanced anti-aircraft rockets missing from a raided storage space in Tripoli this week, concerns rose that the Gaddafi regime's weapons had been smuggled into neighboring Niger, Mali or Mauritania by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. "AQIM is flush with ransom money, and they're the most likely to buy them."***
 - Nasser Weddady, the civil rights outreach director at the American Islamic Congress who focuses on Mauritania.
 - "North Africa's Sahel: The Next Terrorism Hot Spot?,"*** TIME MAGAZINE, Karen Leigh, 9-12-11
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2092687,00.html>
- ▶ ***"Analysts worry these unemployed guns-for-hire will become a ready pool of recruits for AQIM which has boosted its coffers with ransom money and has in the past outsourced abductions to other mercenary armed groups in the desert."***
 - Tristan McConnell, senior correspondent for Global Post, also East Africa Correspondent, The Times of London
 - "Post-Qaddafi West and Central Africa a 'powder keg',"*** CBS NEWS/GLOBAL POST, Tristan McConnell, 9-11-11
http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-20104517-503543.html
- ▶ ***"This is something that the intelligence services are following very closely... It seems that some members of Boko Haram and Al Shabaab were trained by AQIM."***
 - Gilles de Kerchove, European Union counterterrorism coordinator, September security conference in Algiers.
 - "Post-Qaddafi West and Central Africa a 'powder keg',"*** CBS NEWS/GLOBAL POST, Tristan McConnell, 9-11-11
http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-20104517-503543.html
- ▶ ***'Thousands of shoulder-launched heat-seeking missiles were found to have disappeared from looted warehouses in Tripoli this week. "If these fall into the wrong hands they could turn all of North Africa into a no-fly zone"'***
 - Peter Bouckaert, Human Rights Watch, told media after discovering the missing munitions in Libya.
 - "Post-Qaddafi West and Central Africa a 'powder keg',"*** CBS NEWS/GLOBAL POST, Tristan McConnell, 9-11-11
http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-20104517-503543.html
- ▶ ***"Intelligence reports confirm that large amounts of Qaddafi's arms are swamping the area. Turning a blind eye to this dangerous situation is not an option. Growing numbers of AQIM operatives and well-armed mercenaries are the new mujahedeen, transforming the Sahel into a trans-African superhighway of terrorism and trafficking."***
 - Ambassador Edward M. Gabriel, former US Ambassador to Morocco
 - "Peace or a 'powder keg' in North Africa,"*** THE HILL, Commentary by Edward Gabriel, 10-3-11
<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/185089-peace-or-a-powder-keg-in-north-africa>
- ▶ ***"When the Libyan uprising began, several international news reports claimed that the Front—with secret support from Algeria—sent mercenaries to fight alongside Gaddafi's forces. Polisario denies the allegations, though Libyan rebels recently uncovered documents at the Algerian Consulate in Tripoli allegedly confirming Polisario's involvement."***
 - Imad Estito, correspondent for Al Akhbar
 - "Polisario after Gaddafi: The Price of Patronage,"*** AL AKHBAR, Imad Estito, 9-2-11
<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/polisario-after-gaddafi-price-patronage>
- ▶ ***"The status quo in North Africa is untenable... the Moroccan monarchy is the only regime to have initiated meaningful... economic & social change. It is also the only one which enjoys relatively wide popular support."***
 - Anouar Boukhars, Former Visiting Fellow, Brookings Doha Center — The Brookings Institution
 - "Tunisia's Political Earthquake,"*** BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, Anouar Boukhars, 1-20-11
http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/0120_tunisia_boukhars.aspx
- ▶ ***"It now seems there is ample evidence that the Polisario Front... is in league with al-Qaeda."***
 - Jennifer Rubin, columnist, Washington Post, citing recent news and reports from the region
 - "Morocco: A Different Kind of Muslim Country,"*** WASHINGTON POST, Jennifer Rubin, 1-12-11
http://voices.washingtonpost.com/right-turn/2011/01/morocco_a_different_kind_of_muslim_country.html
- ▶ ***'Conditions are dismal for Saharans living in Polisario camps, "a breeding-ground for potential future AQIM recruits."***
 - Michael Braun, former U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency chief of operations and intelligence,
 - "Unlikely bedfellows: Are some Saharan Marxists joining Al-Qaida in N. Africa?,"*** FP/MIDDLE EAST CHANNEL, 1-3-11
http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/03/unlikely_bedfellows_are_some_saharan_marxists_joining_al_qaida_operations_in_north

TEN YEARS LATER: RISING INCIDENCE OF TERRORISM IN MAGHREB & SAHEL SINCE 9/11



In the ten years since Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks by *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM) and other militant extremists in the Maghreb and Sahel have increased more than 500% from their low in the period to hit a high of 204 attacks in 2009. In 2011, the number of terrorist remains dangerously high, and is on a pace through the third quarter to reach 193 attacks for the year. Over the past decade, 1,247 terrorist bombings, murders, kidnappings, and ambushes —against international and domestic targets—claimed more than 2,000 lives and 6,000 victims in Algeria, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia.

Last year, intelligence reports and arrests confirmed AQIM has opened links with Latin cartels for ‘drugs-for-arms’ smuggling to Europe through terrorist-trafficking networks in the Sahel that include members of the Polisario Front. Recently, intelligence reports from officials in the region confirm that a variety of arms from the Libya conflict, including surface-to-air missiles, may have fallen into AQIM hands in the Sahel.

Data Table: Terrorism Incidents in Maghreb & Sahel since Sept. 11, 2001

TIMELINE	YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 thru 9/30
NORTH & WEST/CENTRAL AFRICA NATIONS	Totals: 1,247 attacks	21 attacks	55 attacks	31 attacks	44 attacks	104 attacks	153 attacks	161 attacks	152 attacks	204 attacks	178 attacks	144 attacks
ALGERIA	1,068 attacks	20	54	28	39	93	120	110	121	185	168	130
CHAD	58 attacks				3	6	28	14	6		1	
LIBYA	1 attack						1					
MALI	44 attacks			1	1	2	3	10	11	9	4	3
MAURITANIA	25 attacks				1	3		4	4	6	2	5
MOROCCO	9 attacks			2				5				2
NIGER	38 attacks						1	18	9	4	3	3
TUNISIA	4 attacks	1	1						1			1